

OBSERVATIONS
ON A
NEW and EASY METHOD
OF
CURING DISORDERS,
BY
FACTITIOUS AIR,
WITHOUT THE
USE of DRUGS.

ALSO,
An ENQUIRY into the MEDICAL PROPERTIES
OF
Positive and Negative Electricity.

By LOFTUS WOOD, M.D.

Medicines are sometimes improper for them who are sick, and always
pernicious to those who are well.

*Medicamentum non semper Aegris prodest,
Nocet semper sanis.*

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CELSUS.

L O N D O N :

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MDCCLXXX.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

OBSTETRIC TREATISE

OF

THE NEW METHOD

OF

CULINARY ARTS

BY

THE LATE DR. J. H. H. H.

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TO THE
PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS
OF THE
MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON.

FOR their laudable and unwearied attention in promoting and encouraging a further knowledge and progress in the Science of Medicine; and for the honour I have received in being admitted a Member, and appointed Secretary to that Society, as a small token of my gratitude these observations are most respectfully addressed, by

Their most obedient

Very humble Servant,

LOFTUS WOOD.

*George - Street,
Hanover-Square,
Feb. 1, 1780.*

TO THE
HONORABLE
MEMBERS OF THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS

IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

THE PETITION OF

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P R E F A C E.

THE following Essay is calculated with a view to promote further inquiries into the nature and medical properties of the different kinds of air and electricity.

Fixed air is first treated of, being more frequently used and better understood than any of the others : I have mentioned some cases wherein it has been used as an internal medicine with the greatest success.

Next, the antiseptic qualities of nitrous and inflammable air are taken notice of ; after which the powerful effects of fixed and other

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OF THE

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AND OF THE

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

AND OF THE

ROYAL SOCIETY

AND OF THE

ROYAL INSTITUTE

AND OF THE

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sorts of factitious air topically applied are examined, the use of baths recommended, and portable ones proposed.

Lastly, some strictures on the present mode of using electricity in the cure of disorders, attempting to prove, that drawing of sparks or giving shocks to the patient are not the most effectual methods for removing obstructions ; these observations end with a new theory on the use of negative electricity, in the cure of acute and inflammatory disorders ; being some apology for ushering this little performance into the world of letters.

The whole intended for the reading of those not acquainted with medicine, as well as the faculty, for which reason, all technical terms of the art, are left out, and the language made as plain and simple as the subject would admit.

The few cases mentioned in this performance are authenticated by authors of undoubted veracity ; but even although every word may be
litterally

literally true, its being an innovation upon the old beaten paths of physic will no doubt create it oponents ; and it will be turned into ridicule by many who understand nothing about the matter ; besides those who may be directed by self-interested motives ; to those it may be observed, that the greatest Philosophers in *Europe* make this particular part of medicine a favourite study, great things have been performed by it, and many more are expected to be done.

The incredulous ought to remember how much the present salutary mode of treating the small pox, acute and putrid disorders, was at first rejected ; when, at present, if a physician would treat these disorders in the same method as they had been formerly, he would not merit that name.

Those who think that the number of medicines used in the shops, are sufficient for the cure of all disorders, ought to consider that a confirmed gout, dropfy or consumption are yet without their antidotes.

The great number of patients, afflicted with various disorders, that naturally come under my care, being one of the physicians to the Surrey and Misericordia Dispensaries, hath given me an opportunity of confirming many of the following observations; I am at present collecting a proper apparatus, in order to carry these researches still further; the result of which I hope in time to present to the public:

O N

F I X E D A I R.

THIS addition to the *Materia Medica* has engaged the scrutiny of every Philosopher in Europe; for its effects as a chymical emanation, has excited their wonder, whilst its powerful, though mild attacks upon the human body, in removing a variety of disorders, have set it high in the scale of Medical Arcana. There is no doubt but fixed Air is a constituent principle in the human body; it is generated in the stomach by fermentation, effervescence, &c. and being absorbed by the fluids

fluids of it, is carried into the circulation, and becomes a means of uniting the solids, and giving firmness and consistency to the flesh. A mixture of animal and vegetable food by the heat of the stomach, produces this Air, and supplies that perpetual waste of it which is produced by breathing, perspiration, putrid disorders, and such like causes : Hence, at sea, in hospitals, prisons, close habitations, churchyards, &c. by eating food tending to putrefaction, or breathing bad air, the body has an almost irresistible tendency to putrid disorders, and to which this air is found to be the most powerful of all antidotes.

Many able Physicians have given it internally, with a success that never attended any other infant medicine : They have given the saline draught in a new mode, having made the stomach the recipient of its fixed Air : The effectual part of its medical use was lost before this method was practised, for the effervescence of the acid and alkaline parts of the medicine was suffered to discharge the fixed Air, before it was taken into the stomach, so that a neutral salt of difficult digestion, was received, whose only use could be, that the heat of the stomach would produce a residuary effervescence.

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The following are a few of the numerous cases, in which fixed Air was employed as an internal medicine :

Dr. *Dobson*, of Liverpool, relates a case of *Ann Forbes*, who was extremely ill of the small-pox, of the confluent kind, the weather being exceeding hot ; she was treated in the common antiphlogistic method with so little success, that she became intolerably offensive, and had every symptom of a speedy dissolution : The Salt of Tartar with the juice of lemon was given in the state of effervescence every hour ; in the space of one day the putrid stench was diminished, and she perfectly recovered in a short time.

Prince *Gallitzin* ordered this medicine for a woman of Breda, in Dutch Brabant, having a most dangerous putrid fever, who on the ninth day was entirely covered with spots of a red and livid colour, and nearly in the last stage of general putrefaction ; she had cold sweats, and convulsions of the extremities : The bark, and other antiseptic medicines were given without any success. The *fixed Air* was then administered in a decoction of the Peruvian Bark. In the space of three days, the bad symptoms
were

were abated, and a perfect recovery was the effect of this new mode of treatment.

Dr. *Haygarth*, of Chester, a judicious observer of nature, gives us the history of a young boy having been attacked by an ulcerous fore throat, and scarlet fever; his blood was in a dissolved state, and he was dropfical to a very great degree, he had great difficulty in breathing, was frequently roused from sleep, with a sense of immediate suffocation; blisters, emetics, purgatives, diuretics, frictions, and such like medicines were used without any good effect: *Fixed Air* was at length ordered, after which he perfectly recovered in the space of a week.

Dr. *Percival*, of Manchester, mentions, having used *fixed Air* in a great many cases of consumptions of the lungs, that the hectic fever was generally abated, and the expectorated matter became less offensive, but did not perform a perfect cure.

Dr. *Hulme* gives an account of many scorbutic cases cured by this remedy, similar to the following, related by Dr. *Dobson*. A young lady in a confirmed scurvy, having purple spots

spots on her legs and arms, cramps, pains of the limbs, small pulse, oppressions of the breast, debility, foetid breath, soft and spongy gums, frequently bleeding; was perfectly recovered in the space of three weeks, by using fixed Air and eating ripe fruit. The same Author relates the case of an unmarried lady, about fifty years of age, in a bad habit of body, having the jaundice for five weeks to a very violent degree: The common remedies generally employed for this disorder, were used for a considerable time, without affording any relief; she was then ordered *fixed Air* three times a day; by degrees her disorder left her, and she perfectly recovered: In two years after, she relapsed, but was cured again by the same medicine.

Riverius and *Boerhaave* recommended fixed Air as a sovereign remedy in sickness and vomitings in fevers.

This medicine has been often employed as a dissolvent for the stone. In the fifty-seventh volume of the Philosophical Transactions, the Hon. *Henry Cavendish* mentions the great power of fixed Air in dissolving calcarious earths: This fact has been proved by the experiments of several

veral accurate observers, among whom are the gentlemen already mentioned.

We have accounts of variety of cases of the gravel, being perfectly cured by this medicine, even after the kidneys and urinary passages have been in a state of ulceration. Dr. *Hulme* gives the following of a patient who had a stone of a considerable size, in the bladder, which was very nearly dissolved by the use of *fixed Air*, and if the patient had not died of another disorder, he thinks he would have expelled the whole of the calculous matter; for upon opening the bladder, the stone was found in a broken and friable state; the largest fragment not being too great to pass through the urethra.

Although this medicine has often been known to fail in cases of the stone, especially if the disorder had been of long continuance. Yet if we consider that the stones which are formed in the human body, are as various in their nature and composition, as those found upon the sea shore, we can hardly expect to find a universal dissolvent; but this ought not to prevent our trying a mild and safe medicine, which in many cases of this kind, has been of real service. The operation of cutting for the
stone

stone is a painful and dangerous remedy, generally proving fatal to one third of all those who undergo that cruel mode of treatment : This alone is a sufficient cause to make us try every probable method, that would not injure the constitution, nor increase the disease ; for if the Physician succeeds but once in ten times, and cures the patient, his labour is well rewarded.

I must acknowledge, that I have often tried this medicine without being able to perform a radical cure, especially if the stone was large and had acquired a certain degree of hardness ; nevertheless, I generally mitigated the painful symptoms ; and perhaps, if this method had been long enough continued, more salutary effects might have been produced, but, my patients generally became tired, and rather chose to submit themselves to the hands of the surgeon, than be kept longer in suspense of an easy method of cure.

I have made use of this medicine in many cases of the gravel, and almost always performed a cure, or at least relieved the patient from the bad symptoms, for a considerable time. This method must be continued a considerable

siderable time, observing, not to let the patient be costive, and ordering him a decoction of linseed, or marsh-mallows root, and if the disorder be attended with heat and inflammation, a few grains of purified nitre ought to be taken three or four times a day, enjoining the patient to a strict and cooling regimen.

Putrefaction, effervescence of acids and alkalis, solutions of various kinds of metals, acids and calcarious earth, &c. produce fixed air, very different in its nature and medical properties. The Physician ought to be well acquainted with the manner of producing this air, its qualities, and the cases in which it would be most useful; otherwise he must not expect to be successful: It is more than probable, that an inattention to the nature of this medicine, is one great cause why it is not more universally made use of. I would recommend a careful perusal of the books published on that subject by Drs. *Priestley*, *McBride*, *Percival*, *Dobson*, *Ingenbousz*, &c.

Nitrous Air is produced from iron, copper, brass, and some other metals, by solution, in the nitrous acid; also, from gold, or regulus
of

of antimony, dissolved in aquæ regia: This air is different, according to the metals from which it was produced, it is miscible in water, and gives it an astringent taste; its antiseptic properties are very great, it has not been so often used in medicine as fixed Air; perhaps from the difficulty of getting it easily conveyed into the stomach, for it is with difficulty mixed with water, requiring a considerable time in agitating, before it will be all absorbed.

The preparations of steel, copper, antimony, &c. are medicines of great efficacy; no preparation of these metals can be more pure and homogenous than that which is reduced to air, and if I may use the expression of *Celsus*, it is the *gas vitæ* or very quintessence of the medicine.

Although copper is a dangerous metal to be taken internally, yet certain quantities of the air derived from it, may be given with great safety; we know that the most subtle and corrosive poisons are daily used, as powerful medicines, therefore we ought not to be afraid to try a remedy which is safe from the manner of its being prepared. Dr. *Priestley* classing nitrous
B
air

air among the powerful antiseptics, encouraged me to try it in putrid cases, which answered my most sanguine expectations; I gave water saturated with this air to the patient, first in very small quantities, and encreased the dose as I found the stomach would bear it; I also made use of it as a corroborant and astringent medicine, with good success, this air I took from a solution of iron in the nitrous acid; but I have not had sufficient time to make experiments in order to ascertain all the effects of this medicine.

Inflammable air has been supposed to possess medical properties similar to the former, but the great difficulty of mixing it with water, the taste of which did not seem altered after it had been absorbed, prevented me from using it.

Air is said to be unfit for respiration, when it is saturated with a redundant quantity of phlogiston, for which reason inflammable, mephetic, fixed air, &c. are noxious, in a certain degree, when taken into the lungs: Nitrous air, or the flame of a candle introduced into this phlogisticated air, are creterions by which we judge of its purity or impurity, these methods the reader will find fully explained by the Authors
already

already mentioned ; the narrow limits of this performance will not permit me to enter largely into an investigation or chemical analization of the properties of air in general ; I shall only confine myself to the medical part of this enquiry, in hopes of persuading the faculty that this subject is worthy of their further considerations.

In respiration, the air not only expands the lungs that the circulation may be properly carried on, but supplies the blood with heat, and carries off its superabundant phlogiston, as is lately explained by the ingenious *Dr. Crawford*, in his enquiries on *animal heat*.

An animal confined in a small close place soon expires by often breathing the same air, which becomes saturated with such a quantity of phlogiston, as to be unfit for respiration ; therefore pure air is essential to life.

The peripneumonia and phthisis pulmonalis, generally commence with an inflammation of the lungs : Quickness of breathing, heat, and a foulness of the breath, are concomitant symptoms of this stage of the disorder, which are efforts of nature to expel the morbid matter, or redundant quantity of phlogiston, which is

predominant in such inflammatory cases : If this noxious effluvia be not speedily carried off ; the lungs become in a putrid and ulcerated state, and a fatal consumption in a short time closes the scene.

A consumption of the lungs has been looked on, hitherto, as an incurable disorder, no internal medicine being found efficacious enough to stop the progress of the disease. Fixed air, that powerful antiseptic so useful when taken into the stomach, becomes fatal when received in a large quantity into the lungs. A medicine is therefore to be sought that may be grateful to the lungs, whilst its antiseptic properties are sufficient to expel the morbid cause of the disorder : This valuable medicine is not to be found in the chymicals or galenicals of the shops, but you will find it described in the works of that learned philosopher Dr. *Priestley*, under the denomination of *dephlogisticated air*, which may be called the universal panacea for disorders of this kind ; but as things are obtained with difficulty in proportion to their value, unfortunately for mankind *dephlogisticated air* cannot be easily produced in such large quantities as medical purposes would require.

A variety

A variety of experiments have been made by philosophers to overcome this difficulty, altho' Dr. *Priestley* has been able to produce this air from a number of different substances, yet in too inconsiderable a quantity for the patient to breath in. Dr. *Ingenhousz*, in a curious book lately published, shews a new mode of obtaining this air from the green leaves and branches of trees and plants, what is very singular, this air cannot be produced without the leaves are exposed to the light, on the contrary, an air of a noxious quality is generated from them in a dark place.

I have obtained so much of this air as to prove its powerful effects in disorders of the lungs, and by a method of filtering and in some measure dephlogisticating the common air of the atmosphere, making it pass through certain calcareous substances, which absorbs a considerable quantity of its phlogiston; in some measure make a substitute for dephlogisticated air.

The purity of this air is determined by its degree of diminution when mixed with nitrous air, by the vivid rapidity with which a lighted torch burns in it, &c.

Dephlogistified air is generally found to be five times more pure than common air, consequently an animal inclosed in a certain quantity of it will live five times as long as it could do in the same quantity of common air of the atmosphere.

Common air passed through lime water in some measure becomes more pure.

I have mentioned a sufficient number of the properties of this fluid, to prove its great efficacy in medicine, and hope the learned will continue to employ their thoughts on so interesting a subject.

I have not had an opportunity to use this medicine long enough, to present the public with a sufficient number of observations to fully establish its utility.

I now come to a new and very interesting part of my essay ; to shew that these different kinds of factitious air, have been usefully employed as external applications, for this most valuable discovery, the world is indebted to the ingenious Mr. *Walker*, Lecturer on Natural Philosophy ; a very successful experiment that he
made,

made, may be seen in Dr. *Priestley's* fourth volume on the Nature and Properties of air.

The case alluded to, was a great tumour and violent inflammation in a Lady's breast, which had proved refractory to the efforts of a number of judicious men of the faculty; which disorder Mr. *Walker* perfectly cured in a few days, by a topical application of fixed air.

I had an opportunity of being particularly informed of this case from the Lady herself, which perfectly convinced me of the efficacy of the medicine.

Another very extraordinary cure was performed by the same gentleman; a young woman in *Richmond*, having cut her hand very deeply with a glass bottle, some of the fragments by neglect had remained in the part for a considerable time; after the wound had closed, a violent inflammation took place, the part was laid open by a surgeon, and the fragments of the glass were extracted, an exfoliation of the bone, that was underneath this wound, was the consequence; various methods were used to abate the inflammation and heal up the
part,

part, which would sometimes cicatrice, but break out again with greater violence.

Mr. *Walker* being at that time in *Richmond*, he topically applied the fixed air, and continuing that method for about three weeks, she was perfectly cured ; I had the curiosity to visit her myself, she informed me that the disorder had been above five years standing, and that she had entirely lost the use of her hand during the last three years ; when I last saw her the wound was perfectly healed, and the inflammation quite disappeared ; she recovered every use of her hand, and had not the least pain.

Elated with the discovery of so powerful a medicine, I applied it to a number of putrid and inflammatory cases, that had resisted the common modes of treatment, in some of which I succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectation ; in others, I sometimes failed of giving any relief, but never found it to produce an aggravation of the disorder, or any bad symptoms ; the nitrous and inflammable air being applied externally, seemed possessed of a powerful antiseptic quality. I found it a very difficult matter to produce a sufficient quantity of this air for medical purposes, as also getting it perfectly
pure,

pure in its kind, and confining it properly to the part affected, for although I was tolerably acquainted with all the general principles of natural philosophy, I found great difficulty in performing the mechanical part, as it is not to be learned by books, but by experience under the inspection of a good operator. The abstract mathematician can easily calculate the complex motions of a curious clock, but the ingenious artist must compleat the work.

In this difficulty I had again recourse for instructions to my friend Mr. *Walker*, who not only assisted me in producing these various kinds of air, but also constructed a number of curious machines, for applying it to various parts of the body, in the most commodious and simple manner.

In the course of my practice, I had often occasion to order my patients the use of the cold, hot, tepid, or vapour bath; the inconveniency and danger attending those who ought to be confined to their chambers, going to different parts of the town to seek these baths, made me fall upon a method of constructing them in such a manner as to be portable, and easily brought into any patient's chamber: These I
got

got made upon a small and elegant plan, having such powers as to exceed those which were upon an hundred times a larger scale ; therefore since nothing conduces more to the preservation of health, than a proper use of baths, also, their being a powerful agent in removing many disorders, makes me hope, this invention will be recognized by the public, and further recommended and improved by the faculty. By this method, the patient receives every benefit in his own room, that he could have elsewhere, without the trouble, danger, or expence that attend public baths.

Before I conclude this small Tract, I shall offer a few remarks on the nature and medical uses of electricity. A number of Philosophers have made this a favourite study ; and, the learned Dr. *Priestley*, has reduced it to a science : Many ingenious men of the faculty have employed it for the cure of disorders, with much success ; it greatly promotes insensible transpiration and glandular secretion, accelerates the circulation of the blood ; it is usefully employed in chronic disorders, and all kinds of obstructions ; paralytic, rheumatic, hysterical and nervous diseases are often cured by electricity ; we also hear of its good effects in
intermitting

intermitting fevers, rigidity of the muscles of joints, disorders of the eyes and ears, &c.

I am sorry to find, that of late years, this medicine seems not to be held in such universal esteem as formerly. The history of Medical Electricity, furnishes us with a number of well authenticated cures, performed by Physicians of the first rank and eminence; but of late, this part of the *Materia Medica* has degenerated, and principally fallen, in the hands of those unacquainted with medicine; who, instead of insulating the patient, and keeping him for a considerable time in a certain state of electricity, they only, either draw a few sparks from the part affected, or give a few gentle shocks.

Since the invention of the Leyden phial, the nature of positive and negative electricity is tolerably well understood; we know, if the inside of the phial is positively charged; in order to discharge it suddenly, a communication of a conducting medium must be formed between the inside and outside of the phial; immediately an explosion takes place, and a quantity of the electric matter passes from the inside to the outside of the phial, in order to restore the equilibrium

equilibrium, and if a person forms a part of this communication, he will receive the electric shock.

If a number of conductors of the same kind, but of different lengths, form the communication, the electric matter will pass through the shortest; but if any of the conductors are more perfect than the rest, it will pass through the most perfect, without regard to distance.

The fluids of the human body in general, are more perfect conductors than the solids; consequently the electric matter would pass through the veins and arteries in preference to the membranes, muscles, or tendons; therefore, in the common mode of applying electricity, for the cure of rheumatic or paralytic complaints; a number of shocks are sent through the part affected, in order to remove the obstructions which are supposed to occasion the disorder: The course of these shocks, according to the laws of electricity, takes the shortest distance through the largest blood-vessels, and for every shock, only one small and simple perforation is made; it may be easily conceived, how inadequate a very considerable number of such shocks must be, to remove an obstruction.

obstruction. The only effectual method is to insulate the patient, and keep the part positively electrified by a powerful machine, for a considerable time, and this to be repeated according to the exigency of the case; by this means the circumambient air and moisture draws off this matter imperceptibly through the pores, and instead of a few of these ducts being only perforated by a single shock, millions are laid open at the same time, by the moist air being in contract with the person who is in the positive state of electricity.

The celebrated Dr. *De Haen*, who was first Physician at Vienna, used this mode of electricity with great success, in the cure of many disorders; in some cases, he would keep the patient electrified for the space of an hour at a time, and this repeated twice a day for a week,—a method rarely practiced by our modern electricians.

I have made use of positive electricity in a variety of cases, with much advantage, but never succeeded so as to perform a lasting cure, except by *De Haen's* method. It is almost universally acknowledged, that inflammatory and acute disorders, are increased by electricity:

ty: We know that all heating or stimulating medicines accelerate the pulse, and increase the fever; and as positive electricity is in this class, it must be improper in such cases.

Paralytic and rheumatic complaints being often accompanied with acute or inflammatory diseases, led me to consider a mode, by which electricity might be usefully employed in such cases; it was natural to conclude, that if throwing a certain quantity of electric matter into the human body, would heat, as well as accelerate the circulation of the blood; the extracting, or taking a certain quantity away from the human body, must produce a quite different effect.

In order to put this theory into practice, by the assistance of Mr. *Walker*, I constructed an electric machine, that electrified negatively, by forming a communication between the person to be so electrified and the rubber, which answered my expectations; by this means I could lower the pulse in as great a degree as it could be raised by the positive method. I have used this state of electricity in inflammatory rheumatisms, acute and putrid fevers with much success.

This

This method of negative electricity being so little known, and never before practiced for the cure of disorders, is a sufficient cause for my recommending it to the attention of the faculty.

Therefore a book of correspondence is open'd, and the curious in Medical or Philosophical matters, are intreated to become its Benefactors, by communicating their Observations on these Subjects :—A correspondence, which no doubt may contribute exceedingly to the benefit of the Public, will be gratefully acknowledged, and shall be faithfully arranged in future Publications, by directing them to the Author, at the Philosophical and Medical Lecture-Rooms, *George-Street, Hanover-Square, LONDON.*

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